

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

29 NOVEMBER 2007

NORTH EAST AMBULANCE SERVICE: PROPOSALS TO CHANGE AMBULANCE CONTACT CENTRES IN THE NORTH EAST

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To assimilate and distil the views of the Overview & Scrutiny Board on the above proposals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That Members of the OSB consider the contents of the report and following any amendments felt necessary, agree to refer the matter to the Executive, so it may also take a view on the matter.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORT

3. The North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) is presently holding a consultation on proposals around the location of Ambulance contact centres.
4. At a meeting of the Tees Valley Health Scrutiny Joint Committee on 29 October 2007, it considered a presentation from NEAS over its plans for ambulance contact centres. The Joint Scrutiny Committee decided that the matter should be referred to its constituent authorities, for a view to be taken on the proposals. Those views will then be fed into the Joint Scrutiny Committee, which will co-ordinate a response to the statutory consultation, which closes on 11 January 2008.
5. To that end, the OSB met with NEAS on 20 November 2007, to hear about the proposals and make any relevant enquiries. The OSB heard a presentation from NEAS around its proposals which centre on NEAS having two ambulance contact centres, with one in Newcastle and one in Hebburn, South Tyneside. It is proposed that the centre at Ladgate Lane in Middlesbrough will close.
6. Following a series of questions, Members of the OSB arrived at four distinct areas where they have concerns over the proposals.

7. Firstly, on the topic of consultation. The OSB was concerned that NEAS had not sought the views of the Cleveland Emergency Planning Unit about its plans. Further on the topic of consultation, the OSB is by no means confident that the consultation will make any difference to the proposals. Given that the consultation closes on 11 January 2008 and the Board will make its final decision, also in January 2008, there is not a lot of scope for detailed analysis of the consultation's responses.
8. Secondly, the OSB was told that having a second site in Hebburn (as opposed to a Tees presence) would be better for NEAS, in so far as the local labour market in Hebburn is more suited to the recruitment of appropriate staff. When the OSB pressed for evidence on this point, it heard that this was a judgement made by the independent consultancy, Catalyst, which conducted the review and NEAS was unable to substantiate the reasons for such a judgement. Whilst the Consultancy report contains a graph on the matter, it is unclear as to how the judgement had been arrived at. There is also the fact that Middlesbrough scored lower on this element than other areas, yet there is no reasonable evidence provided as to why this judgement has been made. Such a statement about the local labour market could also have negative consequences for the Tees area beyond this immediate decision. This position also appears to take no cognisance to NEAS' general obligation to the economic well being of the region by permanently removing employment opportunities in the Tees area.
9. Thirdly, despite numerous questions around this point, the OSB remains unclear as to the material benefits to local people and future patients of the NEAS proposals. The Webgraphs put forward for assessing different locations claim that there is maximum benefit to the workforce for Bernicia House and Hebburn, yet 25 people working in Tees are clearly disadvantaged. The webgraph's also indicate that there is 0.0 benefit to the workforce at Ladgate Lane and 2.0 benefit for Coulby Newham. Again, given that Tees staff do not wish to move, it is unclear as to how Ladgate Lane 'scores' 0.0. Such apparent anomalies cast doubt on the rest of the webgraph data.
10. Finally, the OSB noted that in the Consultant's report on the topic, it is suggested that for reasons of business continuity, contact centres should not be less than 15 miles apart. The Newcastle/Hebburn model that is proposed would appear to be around 9 miles apart. In addition to that, on page 16 of the consultation document, reference is made to the fact that contact centres should not be 5 miles or nearer to COMAH sites (e.g. an airport). According to web based maps; Newburn is around 4 miles from Newcastle airport.
11. The above outlines the areas of concern that the OSB has with the proposals, as outlined at the meeting on 20 November 2007. Following any amendments that the OSB wishes to make to this report, it is suggested that these views be passed onto the Tees Valley Health Scrutiny Joint Committee to be taken account of when it prepares its formal response to the consultation.
12. In addition, it may be that OSB would like to refer the matter to the Middlesbrough Council Executive, so it may also take a view on the proposals

and contribute to the consultation. Members are reminded that the consultation closes on 11 January 2008.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

13. The NEAS Consultation Document and Consultants Report are both available on www.neambulance.nhs.uk

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